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POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

COMMENT

THEIR WIDE RANGE

POETRY has seldom referred editorially to its current contents, preferring to leave the poems to make their own appeal to each individual reader. But this month we are moved to emphasize the contrast between Mr. Hueffer's poem, in this number, and a poem of the wilderness by Lew Sarett which will be printed in April; and, incidentally, to urge appreciative consideration of the wide range covered by modern poets, the variety of mood and manner in which they present, to the world of today and tomorrow, their interpretations of life.

Mr. Hueffer's is an indoor poem. Its little ancient manor-house, mossy and vine-clad among its gardens and meadows, venerable with family and neighborhood traditions reaching back for centuries, is beautiful with the piteous beauty of the old things; things outworn and outgrown, but lingering in their old place and holding human beings captive to their moss-covered walls. We shall not venture to suggest how far the poet typified the present situation of Old England by his ancient house—a house so dear to all who have received it from their ancestors that the removal of a single tuft of moss would be a desecration; and yet so shabbily inadequate to modern needs that the people fondly clinging to it are enslaved to debt and held to a narrow acreage and outlook, and thereby impaired in power. The implications of Mr. Hueffer's poem are both obvious and profound; and

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the intelligent reader will not limit them to old England, or even to old New England.

Mr. Sarett's poem challenges civilization from the opposite angle, from the high vantage-ground of the wilderness; as readers of his Chippewa monologues in *POETRY* and in his book *Many Many Moons*, will suspect. In the new poem, *The Box of God*, his old Indian, converted by the glitter and glamour of the high altar in the little outpost mission church; electing to stay, a good Catholic, in that sheltering "box of God," but missing, even unto death, the wilder freedom of his old beliefs and customs—in him we see a personification of something bold and splendid in humanity which civilization destroys; a stark spiritual individualism which cannot exist in crowds, which demands the sterner substance to be wrung from nature's free spaces and from scantily peopled tribal barbarism.

We confess a certain pride in offering these two poems to our readers—poems in which the challenge, the eternal question, is symbolically presented according to the muse's unalterable laws, not prosaically stated and argued. And this leads, perhaps, to that larger pride referred to above—pride in the wide range covered by modern poetry, especially poetry in the English language; in its sympathetic response to the period, the human group and the locale—many different groups and locales. Modern poetry is telling the tale of the tribe for the next age; and telling it sometimes in forms of such authoritative beauty that the next age will be compelled to listen.

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This variety, this wide range of modern poetry in English, is more noticeable at present in the United States than anywhere else. Kipling widened the English literary empire enormously in his day; opened up India to the occidental imagination, uttering at least a few questions from the Orient. But today, in spite of the War, British poets cling more and more to the woods and meadows, the customs and traditions, of their tight little island; hesitating to follow their flag into the far-flung provinces of its empire, or to face the future with its problems, material and spiritual, for both the individual and the crowd. And the poets of Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, who will doubtless have their day sometime, have scarcely begun to be articulate.

But here in the United States the poets are certainly speaking out their minds, and challenging the traditional forms with new experiments—whatever the future may say of the results of the ferment. Extravagance and overemphasis may be found among them, no doubt, but even those who shout instead of sing cannot be accused of that deadliest of vices, insincerity. The locale, from New England to Arizona, is demanding its distinctive place; speaking with its own voice, from the aboriginal to the super-sophisticated. There is hardly a problem, social or spiritual, which is not the chief concern of some group of poets, even though it leads them outside of the legitimate confines of their art—to the pulpit, or the soap-box or lecture-hall platform of reform. Nor are our poets daunted by old inhibitions and taboos: already a few have given us free-

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verse lyrics as beautiful as any old songs in rhyme; already we have hints of a truly modern poetic drama, as Mr. Schneider points out in another page of this number. And we of the Middle-west have at least one poet of epic imagination; for Edgar Lee Masters would set forth, on his immense canvas, "a census spiritual, taken of our America," showing

The closeness of one life, however humble,
With every life upon this globe.

Whatever exceptions may be taken in predicting the quality of the ultimate harvest, the most exacting critic must admit a rich growth. According to the *Mercure de France*,

Il est évident que les Etats-Unis entrent résolument dans l'Assemblée des Muses avec une merveilleuse offrande de poésie.

H. M.

THAMES MORASSES

I have just destroyed the article of which the above title remains—the reader's time is worth something. The situation reduces itself to this: Paris is, or at any rate feels as if it were, annoyed that civilization has been held up for five years. It contains the still respectable figure of Anatole France, apologizing for the "*bêtises*" which he has written during the late excitement. It contains a certain number of solid and respectable people, like Salomon Reinach, who go down to the Academy and the Institute and discuss problems connected with literature and scholarship with